Builds Houses For Blue Birds

by F. T. Hanenkrat

W. F. Hanenkrat of Route 2, Appomattox, displays a few of the Blue-bird houses he has made for use this spring. He mass-produces them in lots of 12 or 15 from lumber scraps given him by Clover Hill Mfg. Co.

Hanenkrat is devoting his time and talents as part of a nation-wide effort to save the Blue-bird, which is threatened with extinction.

Blue-birds, who were quite plentiful 30 to 50 years ago, have dwindled in numbers in recent years by as much as 90 percent. This beautiful, gentle bird was once among the most popular in America. Today, many people have never seen one.

Scientists who study birds believe that two factors are primarily responsible. One is the loss of nesting sites. Blue-birds nest near open fields in cavities such as are found in old trees or in wooden fence posts. Today, many people harvest old trees in order to plant young trees as crops, thus removing one source of nesting sites. The other source is also disappearing, for wooden fence posts have largely been replaced by metal onces.

Another reason for dwindling Blue-bird numbers is competition from other species, especially the English (or House) Sparrow, and the Starling. The English Sparrow was introduced into New York from England in the 1850's; the Starling was also introduced into New York in 1890. Both have spread amazingly fast, and the Starling is now one of the most numerous birds in America.

Both the English Sparrow and Starling are extremely aggressive birds, and both compete with Blue-birds for nesting sites, for they also nest in cavities if they find them. The gentle Blue-bird is often evicted from a nest by belligerent Starlings, who destroy the Blue-bird's eggs, throw out its nest, and build one of their own in its place.

If the Blue-bird is to be saved, scientists feel, he will have to be helped along by man. Nesting sites must be provided. Hence, bird clubs and interested individuals all over the United States and Canada are Constructing "Blue-bird Trails" consisting of a number of nesting boxes placed at 100-yard intervals around open fields. One such trail in Canada is 800 miles long.

In order to be successful, Blue-bird houses have to be constructed to fairly precise dimensions. The opening must be exactly 1½ inches in diameter. This way, Blue-birds can enter, but Starlings cannot.

The hole must also be at least six inches above the floor, otherwise English Sparrows will adopt the houses. The boxes should measure four inches across each way inside, be provided with holes for drainage and ventilation, and have doors that swing open to allow for cleaning. If the boxes are cleaned after a brood has been raised, Blue-birds will sometimes produce second and third broods before the end of summer.

Anyone interested in helping save the Blue-bird can get complete instructions for building and maintaining nesting boxes (the instructions are free) by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to "Bluebird," The Wilderness Society, 729 Fifteenth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20005.

Hanenkrat has produced about 50 nesting boxes this year. He may, he says, make some more next year if materials are still available.

He has erected a number of the boxes near his home. A number were donated to a local Scout troop, and a few were given to his son and daughter-in-law, who plan a Blue-bird trail near their home in Lynchburg, Va.

Hanenkrat, now retired, is a former employee of Transco. He and his wife have recently taken up bird watching as a hobby, and this led to his interest in helping the Blue-birds.

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Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Smith of Richmond visited his parents Saturday, Mr. and Mrs. Roland Smith. They also visited her mother Mrs. Lucado.

Mr. and Mrs. John H. Moore of Lynchburg visited Mr. and Mrs. Tom Moore Sunday afternoon and also Mr. and Mrs Roland Smith.

The Oakville Extension Homemakers club meet with Mrs. Dot Wilkerson on Thursday afternoon with good attendance.

We are glad to hear that Mrs. Vera Cyrus is improving. Hope she will be home soon.

Sorry to hear that Mrs. Julian Franklin is in the hospital. We wish her a speedy recovery.

How Ier

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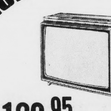

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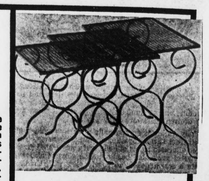

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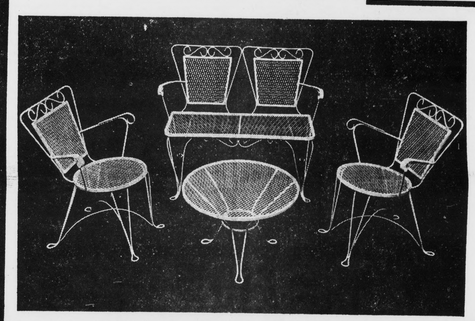

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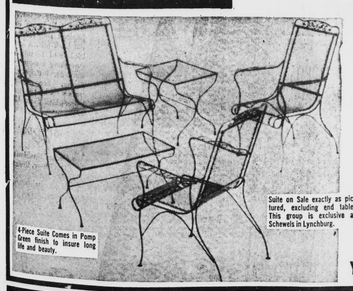

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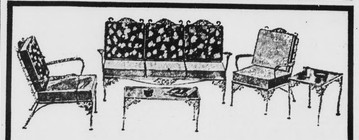

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